

# GOETHE-MEDAL 2023

## LAUDATORY SPEECH FOR GAGA CHKHEIDZE

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Before I go into Gaga Chkheidze's accomplishments, for which he is receiving the Goethe Medal, I would like to tell you how we came into contact with him.

In our film work, we had a special preference for Georgian cinema from the very beginning. During our selection trips for the Berlinale Forum from 1971 onwards, which also took us to Moscow, it struck us that of all the Soviet films we could see, the Georgian ones were the best, most imaginative and most innovative. We invited films from Georgia to our festival whenever possible and developed friendly relations with several Georgian directors as a result.

Against this background, it was not surprising that the Georgian director Lana Gogoberidze (*Some Interviews on Personal Matters*), whom we know well, invited Erika Gregor to an international women's film congress in Tbilisi in 1988. At this congress, a linguistically gifted and knowledgeable young Georgian appeared as an interpreter: Gaga Chkheidze. Gaga spoke German without an accent and had a great deal of cultural knowledge due to his previous studies of German in Tbilisi, then in Jena, which he completed with a degree and a thesis on Robert Musil.

During this visit to the film congress, Erika Gregor and director Eldar Shengelaiia, Secretary of the Association of Georgian Filmmakers, arranged a Georgian film retrospective for our Berlin cinema Arsenal to which three Georgian filmmakers were to travel. Gaga Chkheidze was also invited to Berlin to supervise this retrospective. Gaga's first stay in what was then West Berlin proved to be fundamentally important for us. The films that were delivered at the last moment were all in the original Georgian version without subtitles, although we had been promised subtitled versions. We asked Gaga to step in as translator. He objected that he had never done a simultaneous film translation before – so far, he had only translated Novalis, Büchner, Musil, and Kafka for literary magazines. We countered that the weal and woe of the event depended on his translation – and under these circumstances Gaga agreed to translate the films on the spur of the moment. Actually, he had planned to go to the

theatre during his stay in Berlin! Instead, he now had to translate films every evening. And lo and behold, Gaga delivered brilliant translations and the film week was a complete success.

From then on, Gaga Chkheidze repeatedly spent longer periods with us in Berlin in the 1990s and worked with our team at the Arsenal cinema. Gaga examined the Arsenal's film collection, especially our stock of Georgian film prints. He entered the original Georgian titles for all Georgian films that had previously only been registered in the database under Russian titles.

Through Gaga's help and our ongoing work with Georgian films, the Arsenal's holdings of Georgian film prints subsequently grew and grew, and are now one of the largest in the world.

Gaga Chkheidze worked not only at the Arsenal, but also for the Berlinale Forum, which we organised. He advised us on the selection of Georgian and Soviet films, wrote catalogue entries as well as German subtitles, and translated texts. He was our chief interpreter for the translation of film talks and at times he also looked after the Forum's selection committee. He accompanied the Georgian and Soviet filmmakers who came to the Berlinale or presented their films at the Arsenal. For him this was a gathering of experience, for us essential and sometimes irreplaceable assistance.

In 2000, Gaga Chkheidze founded his own festival, the Tbilisi International Film Festival. We have been a partner of this festival from the very beginning. In this context, the important role of the Goethe-Institut Tbilisi should also be mentioned. Many festival events took place at the Goethe-Institut. I remember one particularly lively debate about the situation of cinemas and film culture in Georgia. The debate was so passionate that parallel groups kept talking at the same time, making suggestions and demands.

Gaga Chkheidze has continually worked to maintain and develop film theatres in Tbilisi and Georgia. In 1997, for example, a large-scale retrospective of selected films from the Berlinale Forum was held at the centrally located Dom cinema, a film theatre founded by the Georgian Filmmakers' Association.

To this day, Gaga's festival particularly emphasises the participation of films from Germany. There was and is a special section for films from Germany at the festival. It is called "Made in Germany" and is organised together with the Goethe-Institut Tbilisi.

Many renowned filmmakers, producers, and directors from Germany were guests at the festival in Tbilisi, including Helma Sanders-Brahms, Ulrike Ottinger, Reinhard Hauff, Klaus Eder, Fred Kelemen, Burghardt Klaussner, Margarethe von Trotta, Veit Helmer, Peter Rommel, and

Matthias Freihof. The Forum was also a partner of the Tbilisi Film Festival, inviting the Georgian winners of the festival to the Berlinale. Over the years, young Georgian filmmakers were invited to Berlin. In this way, friendships and professional contacts were established, resulting in several co-productions between Germany and Georgia.

Today, the Tbilisi Film Festival enjoys an international reputation and is one of the most important cultural events in the country. The Georgian National Film Centre, which Gaga Chkheidze directed from 2005 to 2008 and from 2019 to 2022, made a pivotal contribution to the creation of documentary and feature films in Georgia that had exceptional festival careers and cemented Georgia's reputation as a filmmaking nation. This includes Gaga Chkheidze's work from 2005 to 2021 on the board of the Foundation for the Development of Georgian Film (also called the Georgian Film Fund), an institution that promotes the development of the Georgian film industry by providing financial support to film projects.

The aim of Gaga Chkheidze's work was to integrate Georgia even more into international, especially European, film structures, to create new opportunities for young Georgian filmmakers to participate more in the film industry in Europe and the world.

Among the best-known Georgian directors of recent times are Nana Jorjadze (*A Chef in Love*), Salomé Jashi (*Taming the Garden*) Dito Tsintsadze (*The Man from the Embassy*), Aleksandre Koberidze (*What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?*), Nana Ekvtimeishvili (*My Happy Family*), and Salomé Alexi (*Line of Credit*). These films were profoundly discussed at festivals, including Berlin, screened in cinemas and on television, won prizes, and raised Georgia's profile as a filmmaking country with new, innovatively powerful talents. Gaga Chkheidze played a significant role in the making of these films.

We congratulate Gaga Chkheidze on being awarded the Goethe Medal. Gaga Chkheidze has made groundbreaking achievements in establishing relations between Georgia and Germany, in developing Georgian cinema and film culture in Georgia. The award of the Goethe Medal is more than deserved and will, we hope, be useful as a stimulus and backing to continue this work in his country.